

Considerations for Amendment to the Council’s Housing Register and Allocation Policy - Consultation

Following enactment of the Localism Act, East Herts Council now has more discretion over who may join the Housing Register and what priority they are given. In the next few months, members of the local community and other stakeholders will be asked what factors they consider important in determining who should be able to register for housing and what criteria should be considered in assessing their priority.

Their views and preferences will be taken into account in formulating our draft Housing Register and Allocations Policy. Due regard will also be given to the Government’s guidance document, ‘Allocation of Accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England’ which was published on 29 June 2012. This code of guidance is statutory advice as to the policies local authorities should adopt in allocating housing. The code of guidance builds on the flexibilities in the Localism Act and suggests greater freedoms and discretions for councils in deciding whom they might prioritise for affordable housing within the existing primary legislation. The Council will also have regards to its Tenancy Strategy once published and the published Housing and Homeless Strategies.

The Council is committed to the Choice Based Lettings Scheme (HomeOption) and will continue to allocate housing accommodation in this way. There are no current plans to alter the choices offered to those on the Housing Register.

Now	Future Options	Comments
<p><u>Eligibility and Qualification</u></p> <p>Currently the Council has an</p>	<p>The Government determines the type of person</p>	

<p>‘open’ common Housing Register (HR). The HR is open to all except those deemed to be ineligible by legislation, these include certain people subject to immigration control and those considered not to be suitable to be a tenant due to past behaviour e.g. rent arrears or anti-social behaviour.</p>	<p>that is not eligible for an allocation due to their immigration status. However it has removed the legislation regarding persons not being eligible due to unacceptable behaviour. The Government has introduced the concept of qualifying persons. These are qualification rules set locally regarding who can be made an allocation of accommodation. The examples offered include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Only qualify for the HR if applicant is in a reasonable preference category i.e. no statutory need. <i>This would reduce the number of applicants on the HR however likely to significantly increase the number of reviews of the decision to either remove or exclude a household. We do not have an unmanageable number of applicants on the register and with on-line applications we may lose a lot of valuable data. Could change our working practices e.g. light check on point of entry to HR and fuller check prior to successful bid?</i> ○ Have the option to set residency qualification. <i>Currently we give additional points for local connection but can change this to qualification for the register. However this may just lead to increased homelessness and more households in temporary accommodation waiting to qualify for the HR. Need to be</i> 	
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	<p><i>mindful of what our neighbouring local authorities are doing and ensuring exemptions for Armed and Reserve Forces.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Income level bar. Needs to be a robust figure that is considered at entry to HR and also prior to an allocation. Could spend a lot of time checking wage slips and keeping up to date with applicants' circumstances? Currently give points for low income as well as applicants on benefits. Consider these could be different for those requiring general needs compared to sheltered accommodation.</i> ○ <i>Home owners would not qualify unless in exceptional circumstances. This is in our current policy except we ask for proof that home is on the market and either no equity or applying for sheltered accommodation.</i> ○ <i>Behaviour on a previous or current tenancy e.g. rent arrears or anti-social behaviour. This will need to be put in any new policy as been taken out of the governments statutory ineligibility rules.</i> 	
<p>Reasonable Preference categories When framing their allocation</p>	<p>The reasonable preference categories remain unchanged by government. However we can</p>	

<p>scheme to determine allocation priorities we must ensure that reasonable preference is given to the following categories of people:</p> <p>We do this by the award of points top recognise the need and the degree of need within each category.</p>	<p>give additional preference to particular descriptions of people who fall within the statutory reasonable preference categories. This is where the government would like LAs to consider giving additional priority to the former Armed and Reserve Forces or their bereaved spouses.</p> <p>We can also consider additional local priorities to determine relative priorities between applicants in the reasonable (or additional) preference categories or not. They suggest that some of the local priorities could be determined via the HR others could be part of a Local Lettings Plan.</p> <p>Examples they suggest include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Behaviour: priority to those that have been model tenants or have benefitted the community. Or take priority away if evidence of poor behaviour. <i>This is very woolly and difficult to put into a robust policy e.g. for how long and what sort of benefit to the community would qualify.</i> ○ Households affected by under occupation and Welfare Reform 2012. <i>Current policy gives the same number of points to those over crowded as to those under occupying. Is this sufficient or could we consider a different method?</i> ○ Members of the armed forces. <i>What sort of additional priority should we award and</i> 	
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	<p><i>in what circumstances e.g. honourable/dishonourable discharge, length of time since discharge?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Households in work or seeking work. <i>Currently CORE shows that approx 20% of households were in work that were housed in East Herts last year. Do we need to look at additional preference or is this sufficient? What would be the impact on Council’s homeless figures if we were to change the balance of the households we house and associated costs work load etc?</i> ○ Prospective fosters or adopters: <i>Not sure how much of a problem this is and would want some solid commitment to the scheme before an allocation could be made. Effect of Welfare 2012 needs to be considered if under-occupying.</i> 	
<p>Transfer Applicants Currently we have a common HR where applications from existing social tenants requiring a move are managed by the Council. Those freeing up accommodation in East Herts are given additional points on their application. Checks are made at point of entry to HR and also prior to an offer</p>	<p>We have the option to take transfer applicants that do not fall into a reasonable preference category off of the HR. The government suggest that this could be a way of allocating homes to low need households encouraging people to move for work This could also include under-occupying households not in a reasonable preference category. Government suggestions for how this group could be managed include administering a separate list with a quota of properties per annum. Or</p>	

<p>regarding arrears, behaviour etc. Management transfers are given high priority for a move. Under occupying applicants get points that reflect the number of bedrooms they are giving up. sty in existing social housing are managed</p>	<p>presumably they can be excluded completely and just directed to MX !</p> <p><i>Managing a separate list would obviously have additional resources implications. Difficult to know how many households currently on HR need to move just for work and of those of the number of working age that are unable to.</i></p>	
<p>Comments</p>		

We would like to know your opinions on these proposed changes to our existing allocations policy. Do you agree with them? If not, what alternative suggestions do you have which you would like us to take into account?

Please reply by 10 September 2012 to: -

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